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Adm. Turner's Failures

By William Safire

WASHINGTON, Nov. 22 — In a handwritten note dated Nov. 11 to "Cy, Zbig and Stan," President Carter wrote: "I am dissatisfied with the quality of political intelligence." The President icily directed Secretary of State Cy Vance, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner to correct the situation.

Although directed to three men, there can be no doubt that the target of Mr. Carter's dissatisfaction was the man directly responsible for the quality of international political intelligence: his old Annapolis chum, Admiral Turner, who misled the President with a wholly inaccurate midsummer assessment of the revolt in Iran.

At our \$13-billion-a-year intelligence agency, the reprimand from the angered and embarrassed President is treated by bravely smiling officials as "constructive criticism," along with mutterings that the secret communication between the President and his D.C.I. must have been leaked to this columnist by backstabbing White House aides.

The failure to detect a serious internal threat to Iran, our most important

strategically, was not the only blunder by the speechmaking Admiral Turner.

1. *The breakdown of security:* A 23-year-old clerk was hired by the C.I.A. and promptly placed in its operations center, with access to a national secret the Soviets wanted: the manual to our spy satellite, the blinding of which would make SALT verification impossible.

The clerk not only walked out of the building with the manual to sell to the Russians, but the numbered copy was not missed for eight months; incredibly, when the young penetrator sought to come back to the C.I.A. to unburden his soul, our paralyzed counterintelligence arm refused to listen to him. Finally the F.B.I. nabbed the low-level penetrator; the Soviet "mole" who directed the operation is thought to be still in place.

No heads rolled as a result of these unprecedented breaches of security; blandly, the agency announced it was locking barn doors.

2. *The Eastern Mediterranean failures:* The Senate Intelligence Committee has a copy of the C.I.A. misassessment on Iran; C.I.A.-man-turned-columnist Cord Meyer reports that officials who have seen it call the mid-August assessment "180 degrees wrong."

The senators do not yet have the misjudgment made by State Department intelligence when it received a report from Iranian sources that a coup was to take place in 72 hours in Afghanistan. State — and the C.I.A. — shrugged it off, and the United States was caught flat-footed.

Meanwhile, Pakistan, once a staunch U.S. ally, is about to make its deal with the Soviet Union; when Admiral Turner's minions come up with this information, it will probably be "analyzed" into oblivion.

Evidence of White House disgust with repeated C.I.A. failures: On Nov. 2, Brzezinski aide David Aaron called in Richard Helms, the former D.C.I. and Ambassador to Iran who had been a favorite Carter target, to get a straight story on what was happening then in Iran.

3. *The loss of quality control:* To shield himself from criticism, Admiral Turner brought in "the Gang of Eleven" — a band of order-following naval sycophants — and did away with the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, independent citizens charged with evaluating the quality of intelligence estimates. This group — Piffab — irritated the C.I.A. bureaucracy by occasionally calling for out-

belatedly recognizing the need for quality-control review (and not merely oversight of dirty tricks). C.I.A. officials have testified secretly that they are thinking of setting up a new review board. The names banded about include retired Gen. Bruce Palmer and former diplomat William Leonhart — estimable gentlemen, but neither steeped in intelligence evaluation.

Needed instead are scientist-businessmen who understand the new technology, and skeptical academics who can challenge conventional estimates. These men should answer directly to the President, and not — as Admiral Turner prefers — be under the thumb of the C.I.A.

In the Turner tenure, we have seen no "abuses," which is nice. Instead, we have seen the destruction of our clandestine service; the worst leaks of national secrets in a generation; the replacement of independent analysis by the rubber-stamps of fawning yes-men; and a series of misjudgments which were the basis for displays of ineptness in foreign policy.

No wonder the President is upset. Although demonstrated incompetence has never been a cause for dismissal in his Administration, perhaps some beribboned, prestigious post could be found into which the Admiral could be slotted: a political job, with no military responsibility, which now requires only the ability to salute the judgment of the President — say, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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